

The Effect of Pets on Anorexia Nervosa

Someone's Name

California State University, Fullerton

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Anorexia nervosa (AN) has the highest mortality rate amongst any other psychiatric disorder (Lloyd et al., 2019). AN is characterized by symptoms including distorted body images, fear of weight gain, and a below average body weight (Lavender et al., 2013). Studies have shown that less than 50% of individuals who have AN make a full recovery (Lloyd et al., 2019). This growing disorder pressures physicians and other specialists to find additional and better treatments (Schenk et al., 2009).

Those who are diagnosed with AN are also at a higher risk of other health issues such as anxiety (Thornton et al., 2011). Clinical observations reported high levels of anxiety in those who are diagnosed with AN (Lloyd et al., 2019). Anxiety and AN have been found commonly comorbid. Findings show that over 80% of individual who have AN have or will experience one or more anxiety disorders in their lifetime. Around 40% of anorexic patients have been reported to have generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) (Thornton et al., 2011). Up to 50% of patients with AN reported fulfilling the characteristic of social phobia, a type to anxiety disorder (Schulze et al., 2009). Anxiety in individuals diagnosed with AN have been reported to be both positively and negatively reinforcing, which in result preserves the illness in the patient (Thornton et al., 2011).

There are numerous treatments that are used to treat anxiety, one treatment includes the introduction of pets and animals (Friedman, 2013). Animal-assisted therapies involve interactions between the patient and an animal to lower and diminish anxiety in patients (Hoffman et al., 2009). There are also many physiological and psychological health benefits to having pets. Pets can decrease stressful situations and allow people to avoid a stress response entirely. Pets and animals can also reduce anxiety by providing a pleasant focus for attention,

promoting feelings of safety, and providing companionship (Friedman, 2013). Previous studies have shown that dogs increased interpersonal communication and decreased anxiety amongst individuals who have other psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia (Lang et al., 2010).

There has been a lack of anxiety focused treatments for AN (Lloyd et al., 2019). With anxiety and AN having a high comorbidity, therapeutic targeting of anxiety may be important and promising for those affected with AN (Thornton et al., 2011). Therefore, the purpose of this current study is to determine if an introduction of pets (anxiety focused treatment) will decrease the effects and symptoms of AN. Based on the positive effects that pets and animals have on anxiety, I hypothesize that these types of treatments can also be used to treat AN, due to the high comorbidity of anxiety and AN.

Methods.

Participants of the experiment will first undergo a screening to determine if they meet the circumstances of the study. The initial screening included anxiety and AN surveys. To test for anxiety the Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory will be conducted. This well known, 40-item questionnaire provides norms for trait anxiety. AN will be assessed using the Eating Disorder Inventory.

Participants showing symptoms of AN classified in the DSM-IV for at least 3-months will be admitted to the study. After initial testing, a previously trained pet will be given to the participant for a period of 6-months. Once the 6-month period is over, a retest of the same scales will be conducted. Scores will then be compared from initial scores to current scores with the pet. For both the initial testing and retest, participants will be administered the survey on a computer on campus to limit any biases due to context.

The study will be conducted as a within-group comparison. Using a mean difference of 24% and a standard deviation of 9% as found in (Lang et al., 2010), an a priori power analysis was conducted to test the difference between one group's initial and post condition means with an alpha of .05. Result showed that a total sample of 19 participants was required to achieve a power of .80. A paired sample t-test will be conducted to compare the means.

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